

## **A Woman Like No Other**

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Over 100 years ago, Frances Willard was a leader who fought for women's rights. Her house, Rest Cottage, can still be found in Evanston, Illinois. Because she became an avid leader in the Temperance Movement, she was one of the first women to have a statue placed in Statuary Hall at the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

On September 28, 1839, Frances Elizabeth Willard was born in Churchville, New York, one of three siblings. At the age of two, her family moved to Oberlin, Ohio, in order that both parents could further their college education. Her father studied for the ministry, but within five years, his health began declining; it was thought he had contracted tuberculosis. A physician recommended pursuing a life outdoors; hence, Willard decided on farming. As a result, Frances' family packed up and set out on a three-week journey to Wisconsin. Upon arriving, her father constructed a house, making sure it had a study room for Frances and her siblings.

By the time Frances turned fourteen, her father and a neighbor built a school house a mile away from their home for the Willard's children and all the children in the area. Not to her father's liking, in 1856, Frances, along with her sister, Mary, began attending the Milwaukee Female College. By 1858 both transferred to the Northwestern Female College in Evanston, Illinois and, in that same year Frances graduated and was named valedictorian. At both Milwaukee and Evanston, her teachers knew her as a respectable and reliable student who loved to read and write. Little did they know, fifteen years later she would begin her work in the Temperance Movement.

After graduation, Frances decided to pursue a career in teaching. In 1860, she found a job at Harlem, Illinois, at the age of twenty-one. Some thought the undisciplined boys would drive her away from her job, but Frances won them over. After two years, her brother took over her position and she moved on. Frances began teaching at an academy in Kankakee, Illinois. Shortly after she began, Frances received a call informing her that her sister was very ill. She immediately returned home, and after burying her sister, returned to Harlem to resume her teaching position.

In 1863, Frances was offered a job at Pittsburg Female College, where she wrote a biography about her sister called “Nineteen Beautiful Years.” She taught at Pittsburg for a year before returning to Evanston to teach at the Grove School. In 1866, Frances taught at the Genessee Wesleyan Seminary in Lima, New York. Not long after, her father passed away and Frances and a friend, Kate Jackson, ventured to Europe to study European culture. When she returned in 1871, she became the first woman elected dean of Evanston College for Ladies, but resigned as a result of conflict in 1874 at the age of 35.

After leaving Evanston, Frances began taking an interest in the Temperance Movement. Frances’ father was part of the temperance society and believed in no drinking, and total abstinence. It was natural for her to follow in her father’s footsteps, and it was not until the Women’s Christian Temperance Crusade came to Chicago, Illinois, did Frances become more enthusiastic about the Temperance Movement. She began speaking out and after a few months was soon asked to speak at various temperance assemblies.

She moved east to become more active in the movement and attended the first Gospel Temperance Camp meeting in Maine in 1874. Though few people believed in her, Frances, rather than accepting a position as the principal at a boarding-school, accepted a position as the president of the Chicago branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Upon returning to Chicago, Frances worked endlessly; her main goal was to convince more people to join the crusade. Eventually, she moved to a higher position, the office of corresponding secretary, and by 1879 Frances was elected president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

After becoming president, Frances traveled extensively, and rarely had time for her favorite pastimes such as reading, art exhibits, and music. She always stood firmly for her beliefs and persuaded others to join the Temperance Movement. In 1881 Frances became a supporter of the Prohibition Party and journeyed South. She spent the next three years convincing people to join the fight for prohibition, and in 1884 the Women's Christian Temperance Union openly supported her cause.

In 1866, a temperance hospital was founded in Chicago, and Frances was named superintendent. In that same year, Frances attended the first national council of women, where women from all over, met and talked about their work and united to share knowledge. Frances wrote a world-wide petition, addressed to governments all over the world. She wanted women to sign it, showing their desire for a better world and, surprisingly she was able to obtain over a million signatures by 1895.

In 1891, Frances was traveling less to be home with her aging mother. She eventually died in 1892. After her death, Frances and her friend, Lady Henry Somerset, sailed to England. They traveled back and forth between America and England for the

next six years. While in England, she often spoke about women's suffrage. She could see the British wanted no part of an American telling them what to do, but she soon convinced them to follow her beliefs. Returning to America, she was welcomed back with open arms.

She returned to her hometown in 1897. She made one last speech at her church, telling everyone about her hopes and dreams for the future. In 1898, she traveled to New York, where she died February 17, 1898, after suffering from influenza.

Hundreds lined the streets and stood by her casket to pay their respects to one of the greatest temperance leaders and reformers in America. She was a woman who found her place in society and never backed down from adversity even though, she was not always met with approval. [From Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard A Biography*; Anna A. Gordon, *The Beautiful Life of Frances E. Willard*; Ray Strachey, *Frances Willard Her Life and Work*; and Lydia Trowbridge, *Frances Willard of Evanston*.]